The Name's the Thing:
Today's Hottest "Image" Problem and
How to Solve It

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DESIGN SENSE 24

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package and
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and store planning.
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THE NAME'S THE THING: TODAY'S HOTTEST "IMAGE" PROBLEM

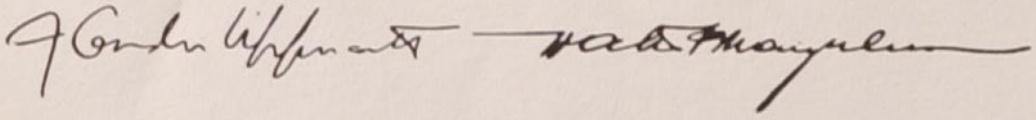
What is the most important element of the corporate and brand image?

If you had to pin it down to just one thing, wouldn't it be, the name — the single word or phrase around which advertising and promotion are structured, reputations made, goods sold, and a place in the market ensured? The element, in short, by which the public *identifies* company, product, or service?

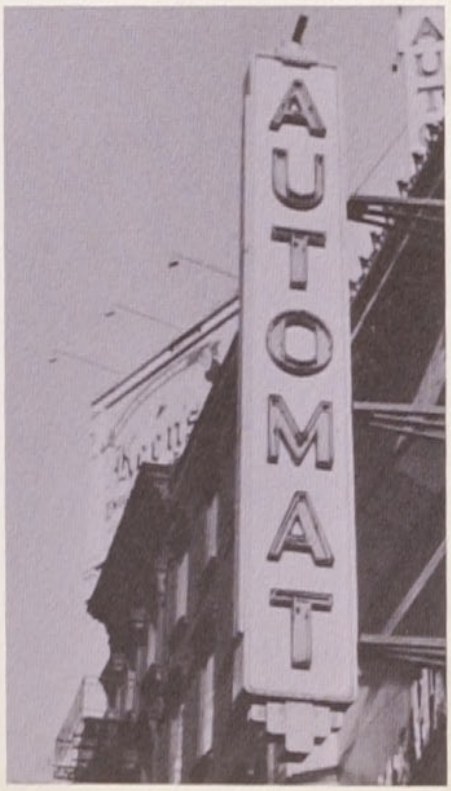
The importance of the name has always been recognized; now suddenly that importance poses a crucial marketing problem. In a situation where companies are merging, expanding, diversifying, and pouring out new products onto the market, new names are in high demand. How do you go about getting a good name — particularly when so many (sometimes it seems nearly all) the best ones are already taken?

As creative consultants to management, much of our work at L & M in the past few years has been concerned with this very problem. In this issue of DESIGN SENSE, we outline — for the first time, we believe — the essentials of this newest of the marketing disciplines, as we have developed them.

You may not agree with some of our conclusions. You may take issue with our temerity in "rating" some of America's most famous names according to our own criteria. One thing, however, we know you'll be in accord with. Name finding *is* the hottest image problem around. It *does* call for a new approach based on system, plan, and program. It *is* a problem for experts, not amateurs.



SINCLAIR OIL BUILDING
PAN AMERICAN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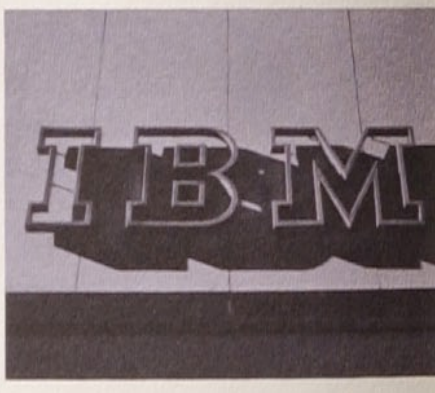
IBM

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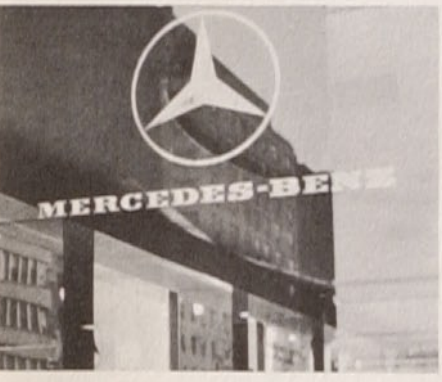
THE NAME'S THE THING



Last year, 22,800 applications for new trademarks were registered with the U.S. Patent Office. Over the last five years, the number of companies on the New York Stock Exchange, announcing a change in their corporate names, represented nearly 10 per cent of all the corporate stocks listed.

One firm announced that it had spent $300,000 in communicating and promoting its name switch. Another estimated that the direct costs of merely finding a name for a new product added up to $50,000 plus an uncounted number of frustrated man hours.

In one case, the stockholders' battle over a new name waxed so hot it reached the front pages of the *Wall*

Street Journal. In another, the new name was found only after six years of exhaustive and exhausting research. Four companies apparently felt that the problem was bigger than they were and named their products (a cigarette, a window cleaner, a whisky and a popcorn) Brand X.

The whole situation came to a climax when one company named itself the Drop Dead Corporation and announced a new product called simply, "Promise."

The drama ranges from dead serious to high comedy, but withal the problem remains acute: U.S. industry — from the biggest of the financial and manufacturing complexes right down to the local retail enterprise — is in deep difficulty over the most traditional of all creative efforts, what to name the baby.

THE PROBLEM: A SHORTAGE OF SUPPLY

The demand for names is at an all-time high today. New products continue to pour out on the market, each one demanding a distinctive, individual and unique name. Companies are merging, expanding and diversifying; any one of these activities tends to make an old name obsolete, and inspire the search for a new one.

As the search intensifies and the number of searchers increases, so in direct proportion, the number of available names keeps shrinking. In the product area, most of the good ones are already taken. (Oh for a modern day "Life Savers"). In the corporate area, the traditional ways of naming companies have lost their impact through too-frequent usage.

The urgency of the problem is compounded by a simple, overwhelming fact of the modern market place: names are more important than they ever were.

As products, services, even companies have become more alike in function, and appearance, the name has assumed new significance. Often it is the sole tangible, differentiating element between one brand and another, one firm and another. In many cases, it is the only *permanent* tool which advertising, promotion, publicity and packaging can use to create the corporate or brand identity, the company or the product image.

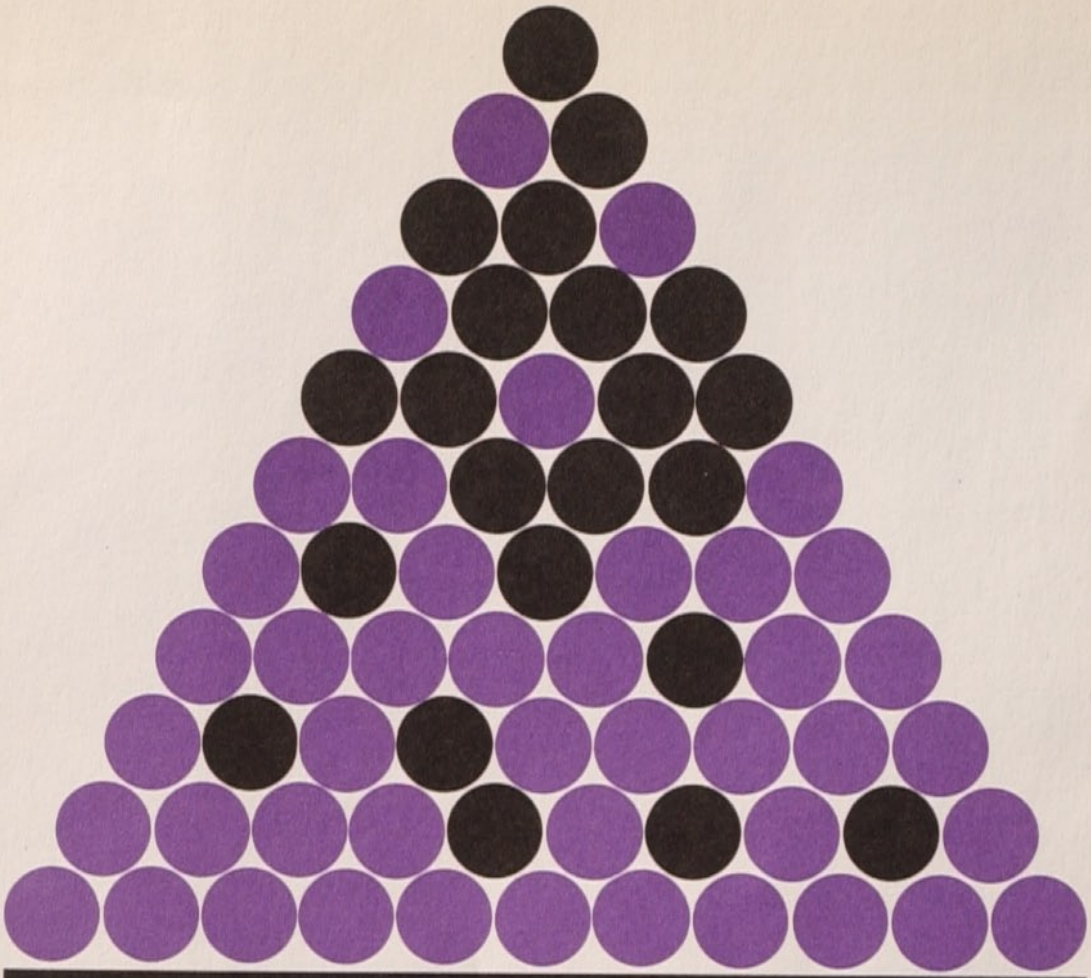
And everywhere, the name is the foundation on which the entire communications program is built.

HOW TO PICK A NAME: INSPIRATION IS NOT ENOUGH

In the good old days it was easy to pick a name. All you needed was a lively mind and some kind of stimulus to get it to work. Harley Procter went to church and when the minister read from the 45th Psalm: "Out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad," he found a name for his soap. A hotel owner saw a grey bus flash by in the night and said: "By George, that looks like a greyhound." Mr. R. E. Olds named his car after the best person he could think of: himself. The Smith Brothers did the same with their coughdrops. Mrs. Bloomer with her liberating female garb, and Messrs. Bradley, Voorhies and Day with *their* liberating male underwear. The first man to think of coining a name found it didn't take much time; he rapidly discarded Hava Cracker, Usa Cracker and Taka Cracker in favor of a sure winner, Uneeda Cracker.

Unfortunately, many — if not the majority — of companies seeking a new name still rely on inspiration as their chief guide.

A classic example is the case of Edsel. Over a period of several years, some 20,000 suggested names were reviewed, including a roster of exotic



A PYRAMID OF NAMES

Finding a name for a company or a product today is one of marketing's biggest problems. Depicted in graphic form, the problem might shape up like this: a pyramid of names with the good ones at the top, the poor ones at the bottom. The purple balls represent the names that are available; no one owns any of these. The black balls stand for those names that are already taken and therefore are not available. Note their position in the pyramid: almost all of them are at the top.

But the key word here is "almost." There **are** still good names available; they **can** be found by the modern-day name searcher. Finding them, however, is not a matter of luck, hunch, or inspiration. It takes a system, a program, and above all, real expertise in marketing's newest speciality–name selection.

candidates ("Hurricane Hurundo," "Dearborn Diamante," "Pluma Piluma," and "Utopian Turtletop") from famed poet Marianne Moore. At the last moment, all of them were thrown into the wastebasket in favor of an inspiration of Board Chairman Ernest Breech: Edsel.

Far be it from us to say that Edsel by another name would have sold better; we merely point out that the name did nothing to help stem the debacle. Just about any name would have been more suitable, including even Hurricane Hurundo and Dearborn Diamante, which for all their preciousness, have at least the distinction of being not only unique, but truly image-provoking.

Or in other words, Harley Procter, Ernie Breech and Bradley, Voorhies and Day notwithstanding, inspiration is not enough.

Of all the creative processes involved in corporate communications, none is more apt to be fumbled through amateur handling than a name selection program.

The process is complex. Many considerations are involved — the problems of name protection, of name clearance, of name appropriateness, of name competition, and of name life expectancy, to list only a few. Without expert, objective advice, the name search is likely to go astray and end up in indecision, frustration, and eventually, failure.

THE CORPORATE NAME: THE DECISION TO CHANGE

The corporate world today is marked by ferment, change, and consolidation, so much so that there is hardly a large company in the U.S. whose name really tells what the company does. Does the name, General Tire and Rubber, for example, indicate to anybody that the company is engaged in such diverse activities as motion pictures and building products? Does United States Steel convey the great variety of this company's operations?

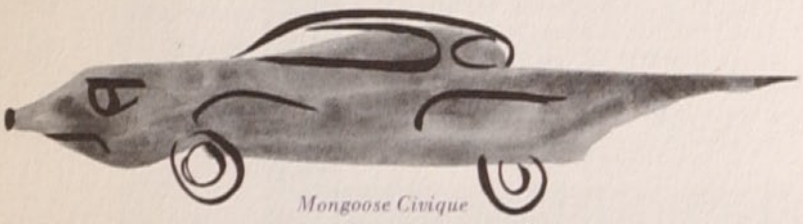
But some of these seemingly-inappropriate names have great equity and a reputation built up over generations; for many of them a name change would be inadvisable.

Several years ago, for example, U.S. Steel faced the problem which is confronting so many companies today: how to communicate its new, expanded and diversified corporate face to the public at large. One solution might have been to change the corporate name. But management never really considered this possibility; the name is obviously such a famous one that its equity is literally priceless. Far wiser to do as U.S. Steel did — change, broaden and re-create the corporate image.

In another case, the Richardson-Merrell Co. might have been better advised had it followed the U.S. Steel path instead of relegating its well-known corporate name, Vick Chemical, to a subsidiary in favor of the joint, relatively unknown new name.

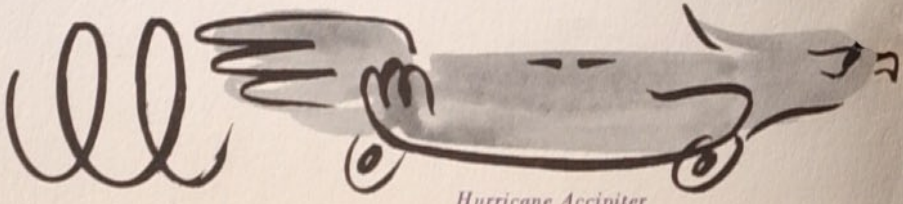
Hence, the key question for many

NAMES THAT NEVER GOT USED,
but will always be remembered, are the exotic suggestions which poet, Marianne Moore, offered for the Edsel. Some of them are fancifully illustrated below. Hers were only a few of the 20,000 that were considered — and rejected in favor of the last minute winner, picked out of the air. As with many aspects of the Edsel, its name selection program proved to be a classic in how **not** to pick a product name.



Mongoose Civique

Regna Racer



Hurricane Accipiter

corporate managements is not, as many believe, what new name to select, but whether to select a new name at all.

FROM AMATEURISM TO EXPERTISE

Here's where expertise first enters to replace amateurism. Name-changing occurs so rarely in the corporate life that most corporate officers have never even experienced the procedure. Lacking such a background, they have nothing to rely on except their own highly personal prejudices. But the decision whether to change or not to change should hinge on the results of several *objective* studies: evaluations of the image conveyed by the old name; analysis of the effectiveness of a name-change versus a corporate image change; research on the effect of a possible change upon the financial community and the company's customers.

With these facts available to it, presented with a clear-cut objective recommendation to accept or reject, management is in a much better position to make the fatal decision, than it could ever be if it followed the dictates of opinion, inclination or inspiration.

THE NAME SELECTION PROGRAM: OBJECTIVITY IS THE KEY

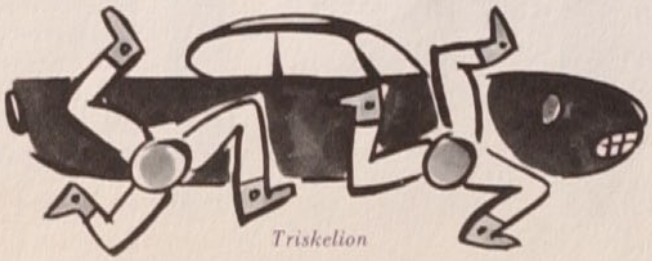
Supposing a company has decided, after all, to change its name. Isn't the process fairly easy now — a matter of suggestion, screening, pruning and finally, selection?

It might be — if the corporation in question were a machine, run by bloodless robots, an organization where personality, politics, and prejudice never intruded. No such corporation exists, however. In all companies the management is made up of human beings. In all companies a political climate exists which makes it impossible for management to evaluate candidate names objectively. The process itself is complicated and involved. It needs the guidance of objective experts.

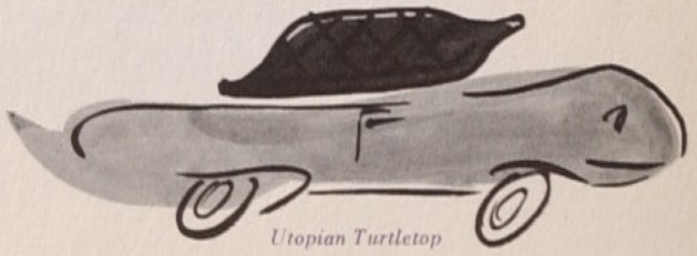
A famous case in point is the recent Olin Mathieson name change. When Olin Industries merged with the Mathieson Chemical Corporation back in 1954, both names were used to make a new corporate name. The group of top officers responsible for the merger were not aware that this name would pose a communication problem. It is not an easy one to put across effectively in advertising and promotion. It was not until six years later that it was realized that the shorter communications name, "Olin" was essential to optimize their communications investment.

THE IMAGE: THE CHOICES

The management which selected the original name, Olin Mathieson, was looking for an answer to the name problem posed by the merger. Obviously, the double-name appeared to be the most logical answer. They were led astray by the method they used; a name selection program should begin with a series of questions, not a series of possible answers.



Triskelion



Utopian Turtletop

KODAK ARVIN
LEBE SLOAN'S
GE
ES

GREAT NAMES AND HOW THEY GREW

THE NAME	THE CREATOR	THE SOURCE
Carnation CARNATION MILK	E. A. Stuart, founder of the company.	Stuart knew he wanted a name to go with his package — a red and white label with some kind of flower in the center. He passed a store, saw a display of cigar boxes with the name "Carnation", and decided it would suit milk too.
 IRON FIREMAN	G. T. Burg, sales manager of the original company and Joseph Gerber, its advertising agent.	Gerber looked at a drawing of a coal stoker and told Burg: "It looks like an iron fireman to me." Burg promptly seized upon the name for a new product. Eventually it became the corporate name as well.
ARROW ARROW COLLARS	Albert Coon, son of a partner in the original firm.	An inspiration of Coon's who announced it to the public with a riddle: I'm narrow, I'm long, I'm fast and' I'm slow."
 SHELL OIL	Marcus Samuels, a London Curio dealer.	From the sea shell trading and importing business which started the Samuels family on its historic international trade ventures.
 WALK-OVER SHOES	Mrs. George Keith, wife of the founder of the company.	Trying to help her husband find a name for his specialty line of shoes, she suggested a phrase she had read in a newspaper account of an international yachting race: "American Boat Has a Walk Over."

Adapted from "Scoops" by Isaac Lambert, University of New Mexico Press, 1941.

The main question, for example, is not: what shall our name be, but rather, what should our name convey?

Can we define the name's optimum image? What attributes should it possess? Is it to be practical, down-to-earth, personal or impersonal, authoritarian or friendly? Is it to be a specific description of the company's operations or merely give a general impression? Should it retain some of the equity of the old name and thus act as an effective communications bridge, or should the name be wholly new?

These criteria, once determined, must then be matched against the possible name categories, of which there are many. Shall it be a family name, a product name, a descriptive name, a set of initials, a joint name, a name coined from elements of the old name, or an entirely new name?

CHRYSLER YES, GIANNINI NO

Each one of these types has much to recommend it. At the same time, each one contains built-in dangers. Many family names have stood the test of time (Chrysler, Heinz, Swift, DuPont). Many new family names would be appropriate choices today, but many would not. A family name is a good choice, only if a logical situation for its use exists, only if industry or product tradition makes it suitable. Isn't "Bank of America," for example, a much better choice for the largest bank in the U.S. than "Giannini Trust" would have been?

Initials have carved the way to name-success for many companies (Alcoa, IBM, Avco), but on the other hand, a set of unfamiliar initials is just about the hardest thing to promote and turn into a recognizable entity. The marriage of Chase and Manhattan is a happy one; that of Chesebrough and Ponds, so far as the name goes, a not too fortunate joining. Coined or created names are the most popular today, but take care in selecting them. They can be dull, uninformative, undistinctive — or imaginative, unusual and vivid.

A MIGHTY HURDLE: LEGAL CLEARANCE

A third requirement must be considered before actual name selection gets under way. Often it is the most difficult of the hurdles; legal clearance.

If the company is a national one, its name must be registered and cleared in all of the 50 states, a monumental job, which is too often neglected until the very end of the name selection program. But, as with product names, company names are often not available. If you want to do business in Illinois, for instance, you must select a name that is not the same or "deceptively similar" to any domestic or foreign corporation doing business in that state. Other states have similar requirements.

Legal clearance should be assured for all final candidate names. There is nothing more heartbreaking (or expensive) than to go through the whole problem of selecting a name, and come up with what looks like a sure winner, only to find that it cannot be legally maintained.

FROM AMERICAN STEEL FOUNDRIES TO AMSTED INDUSTRIES

Recently we were called in to advise on a new name for American Steel Foundries. The case was a classic one, illustrating many of the problems and difficulties involved in a name change.

The old name, used since 1902, failed to convey the expanded activities of the company, which is currently engaged in the manufacturing and processing of component parts for a broad segment of industry. It was also a limiting factor in long-range growth plans.

Our criteria study resulted in a

Product Name Rating Chart: Seven Famous Names Analyzed

THE NAME	AUDIO APPEAL	VISUAL APPEAL	IMAGE	EQUITY	OVERALL RATING
BRECK	Excellent. Incisive, sharp, uses hard, crisp consonants.	Good. Distinctive, short. Interesting letter configuration.	Poor. Totally unsuitable for a cosmetic product.	Intrinsically, only fair. Actually, so well and favorably known, that overall equity is high.	Poor — but only in the abstract. Actually, Breck's top-flight advertising and packaging has turned this name into a real asset.
LIFE SAVERS	Good. Two short, pithy words. Repetition of "f" and "s" sounds make it aesthetically pleasing, memorable.	Excellent. Variety of letter forms is particularly good for graphic treatment.	Superior. Distinctively and effectively relates to the physical form of the product.	Obviously priceless.	Superior. This may be the greatest of American product names. It is ideal in that it connotes both the appeal and the appearance of the product.
SCHLITZ	Poor. Unpleasant sounding. Difficult to pronounce.	Fair. The sequence of letter forms is unfortunate, poses a problem for effective graphic treatments. The word is too "busy."	Fair. German-beer association is good, as is the family-name endorsement. But the word is vulgar in its connotation, suggests cheapness.	Good. Customer familiarity and usage have overcome the inherently poor qualities of this name.	Fair. This name poses a puzzling problem. Should it be altered in some fashion, or has tradition established it too securely in the consumer lexicon?
DENTYNE	Excellent. Effectively combines crisp and soft sounds.	Excellent. Pattern of letter shapes provides opportunities for interesting graphic treatment.	Excellent. Associates immediately with dental health.	Excellent, both because of its inherent qualities and its long-established consumer familiarity.	Excellent. One the best of the early coined names.
THUNDERBIRD	Excellent. Rhythmic, almost poetic. Note the effective use of assonance and alliteration.	Good. Overall configuration is interesting, although the name is somewhat long.	Superior. Ideally suited for a quality sports car. Indian association (god-power-flight) is particularly apt.	Excellent. Inherent potentialities are so good that within a few years this name has become an integral part of the consumer vocabulary.	Superior. Probably the best automobile name since World War II.
COCA COLA	Excellent. A smooth, "rolling" name.	Good. Since three of the four letters in each word are identical, however, care must be used in the graphic treatment.	Excellent. Associates with soft drinks, pleasant relaxation, flavor.	Excellent. Well worth the many legal battles to secure this valuable name. Intrinsic equity however is not good since the name is too easily imitated.	Excellent. Still the best of the soft drink names.
PEPPERIDGE FARM	Good, although too long. First part nicely combines alliteration and crispness.	Good. Length is a problem here too, but fortunately the distinctive part is the longer part.	Excellent. A genuine, natural name, which summons up a picture of quality home-baked goods.	Excellent. This name could and probably will have many imitators but no invented facsimile could match its uniqueness.	Excellent. Only the length prevents this from being a great name. Question: Should or could the "farm" be dropped?
YOUR PRODUCT NAME					

number of clear-cut directions we felt the name selection should take. It should be a name which connoted an industrial operation; a name that was unique, that sounded and looked well; a name which maintained the equity of the former name yet eliminated the words "Steel" and "Foundries" (a large order indeed). It should be applicable for foreign markets, legally available everywhere. Finally it should convey a positive corporate image of substance, diversification and progressiveness.

We eliminated many of the possible name categories open to us. There was no appropriate family name available; a descriptive name would be too long; the initials, ASF, would be undistinctive, too closely associated with American Steel Foundries, too easily confused with American Machine and Foundry's shorthand name, AMF.

A fabricated name, we decided, would be the best solution.

Our names group created 200 fabricated names and the computer (which we use primarily as a check against the limits of our creativity) came up with 3000 candidates. Most of them were nonsense words such as "Inbasicum," "Systeh" and "Dynindue," clearly unuseable. From our original list of 200, 26 were selected for preliminary legal screening. Out of all this pruning, there emerged a single, recommended candidate name, Amsted.

Amsted was tested in depth by interviewing 150 business executives in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York.

Only a short time ago, a product name was judged by a combination of intuition and hunch, backed up perhaps with a market test. Now however, the science of naming has advanced to the point where it is possible to rate a name according to definite pre-established criteria. On the left, seven well-known names are dissected according to these criteria. Some well-known ones turn out to have been poor choices, but this does not mean that they should be changed. The equity of a bad name is often so high that no substitute, regardless of its merit should ever be considered.

What would you think of this company and its activities, we asked them, judging by the name alone?

Our panel thought the firm might be in electronics, industrial manufacturing, utilities, mining or consumer goods. None of these were out of line with the firm's over-all image, and some of them were particularly apt. Most importantly, they felt that Amsted was a large company, diversified, progressive, with sound growth potential. To support this concept further, the word "Industries" was added.

We felt we had a winner; a name that we *knew* to be unique, a name we *knew* conveyed the qualities management sought, a name we *knew* was legally protectable, a name we *knew* could be communicated effectively.

Amsted Industries was unanimously adopted by the management last autumn. It goes to work for the company this coming year. We think it's a good name. We do not think we could have arrived at it, if we had relied on inspiration alone.

PRODUCT NAMING: A BRAND, NOT AN UMBRELLA

The chief difference between the product and the corporate-naming process is not in the technique (product-naming follows much the same path we have traced for corporate-naming including the all-important problem of getting and maintaining legal ownership of the name); it is in the concept.

Unlike the corporate name, the product name does not act as an umbrella, spreading its identifying cover over a variety of activities, operations, people, services, and places. It is rather, a stamp, a trademark, or a brand, a word that burns itself into the public consciousness, implanting a single, sharp, indelible idea.

This is what Coca-Cola, Lucky Strike, Tide, Kodak, Listerine, Spam, and all the great names have accomplished. It is the measure which any new product name should attempt to meet.

The ideal product name can be an adjective, a noun or a verb. It can be the name of a person or place, fictitious or real. It can be the same name as the company name. It can be a wholly artificial name. It can be one or two or even three words. It can even be a number (a particularly good choice today when the letter combinations are beginning to run out). It can be any of these things and, unlike the company name, it doesn't matter so much which of these it is. But it will not do its job, unless it possesses three basic elements:

- The appeal of both sight and sound.
- The prospects of long-term consumer equity.
- The expression of a specific, unique image.

SIGHT & SOUND

Sight appeal means that the name has to look good — on packages, in ads, on the product itself, on signs, billboards, and posters, written in script, printed or typed.

Sound appeal means that it should be pleasing, memorable and distinctive when spoken by salesmen, customers, dealers.

Sight appeal can be determined by trying out the name — by looking at it in action: on packages, in advertisements, even television, on stationery, and in the store window. One of our very first involvements with name work occurred in the development of a package for a new detergent, Lever Brothers' Wisk. Several good candidate names were up for consideration. Wisk emerged as the clear winner when — among other things — its visual superiority was clearly established in experimental promotion and advertising.

"K" IS HARD SELL

Sound appeal is even more important then sight appeal. Methods and means of word reproduction change with the times; the sound of words does not.

Sound appeal need not be left to chance. Even such an early name buff as George Eastman recognized that back in 1888. "The letter K," he said, "had been a favorite with me. It seemed a strong, incisive sort of letter. Therefore, the word I wanted had to start with K. Then it became a question of trying out a great number of combinations of letters that made words starting and end with K." The result, the incomparably great name, Kodak.

Even if he didn't know it, Eastman was using the science of philology, when he coined this name.

We know now that if you want your product name to carry a hard sell message, these explosive consonants, the hard, abrupt b's, t's, d's and k's will do a job for you, as in Tide and Klear.

Similarly, the sibilants, s, ch, z and zh, make soft-sell feminine names (Charm, Chanel), "ings" are musical, "nces" suggest movements, some whole words are beautifully onomotapoetic (Tang). It all sounds dangerously like the rules for creating lyric poetry and so it is; in name work, poetry too must play its part.

VALIANT BUT NOT INDIVIDUAL

In the long run, the projection of a single image is the main job of the product name. Many fall short of the ideal, not because their creators lacked ability to coin or find vivid names, but because they failed, first, to define the precise image they wished to convey.

Sometimes the failure is one of a lack of individuality. A brand image should be one which suggests a single brand, not a product group. Valiant, Corvair, Falcon, Lark, Comet, Lancer and Tempest for example are all good names, when viewed in the abstract. They all convey the ideal of swift movement, and modernity. But that is just the trouble. The names are too much alike, and so are the images. This is *product* imagery, not *brand* imagery, which is really what we are seeking. Rambler is an exception. It clearly refers to a specific individual car.

Sometimes the failure is one of suitability. Spud might have been a good name for some product, perhaps an industrial or mechanical one, but its crudeness and suggestion of vulgarity made it an historically unfortunate choice for a cigarette.

EQUITY SHOULD COME NATURALLY

The final criterion — long-term consumer equity — should, ideally, emerge naturally, if the two other goals, audio-visual appeal and image expression, are achieved. The product name which appeals to the eye, the ear, and the imagination should last a long time. The customer will never tire of it; it will continue to delight his senses.

A word of warning, however. The name selector who is looking for a lasting value (and only a few, such as toy and gadget namers are not) should avoid names which refer to current slang, present-day events, or any other strictly contemporary phenomenon. It might seem a great idea to name a youth product, Rock 'n' Roll, but the marketer who has to consider the next year's and the next decade's youth, would do well to reconsider his choice. On the other hand, Charleston, the Big Apple, and even 23 Skidoo might make excellent brand names today.

Or, in other words, many a rule in brand name selection is notable for its exception.

SEASON THE SYSTEM WITH PROPORTION

Which in the long run is what makes name-selection such a fascinating job. Systems and rules apply. They must be used but they should be tempered with judiciousness, seasoned with proportion, and enlivened with imagination.

Take our own name for instance. It is, as we hope you are aware, Lippincott and Margulies. It is not a good name for a design-marketing firm. It conveys no sense of what we do. It is often confused with a publishing firm in Philadelphia, and, in its abbreviated form, with a popular cigarette. The images conveyed by its separate parts are not complementary.

We have often considered changing it, but our Names group refuses to hear of it. Industry tradition and what we hope is a good measure of consumer equity, dictate its retention.

We admit, then, that the name isn't everything. Many of today's great names were once poor ones. They became great because they were supported by effective advertising and promotion over a long period of time. But nowadays images have to be built fast, or not at all. A poor name poses a formidable handicap; the time to establish it isn't to be had for any price. A good name, on the other hand, is a priceless asset; more than money, it *can* buy success.

John Hanc
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